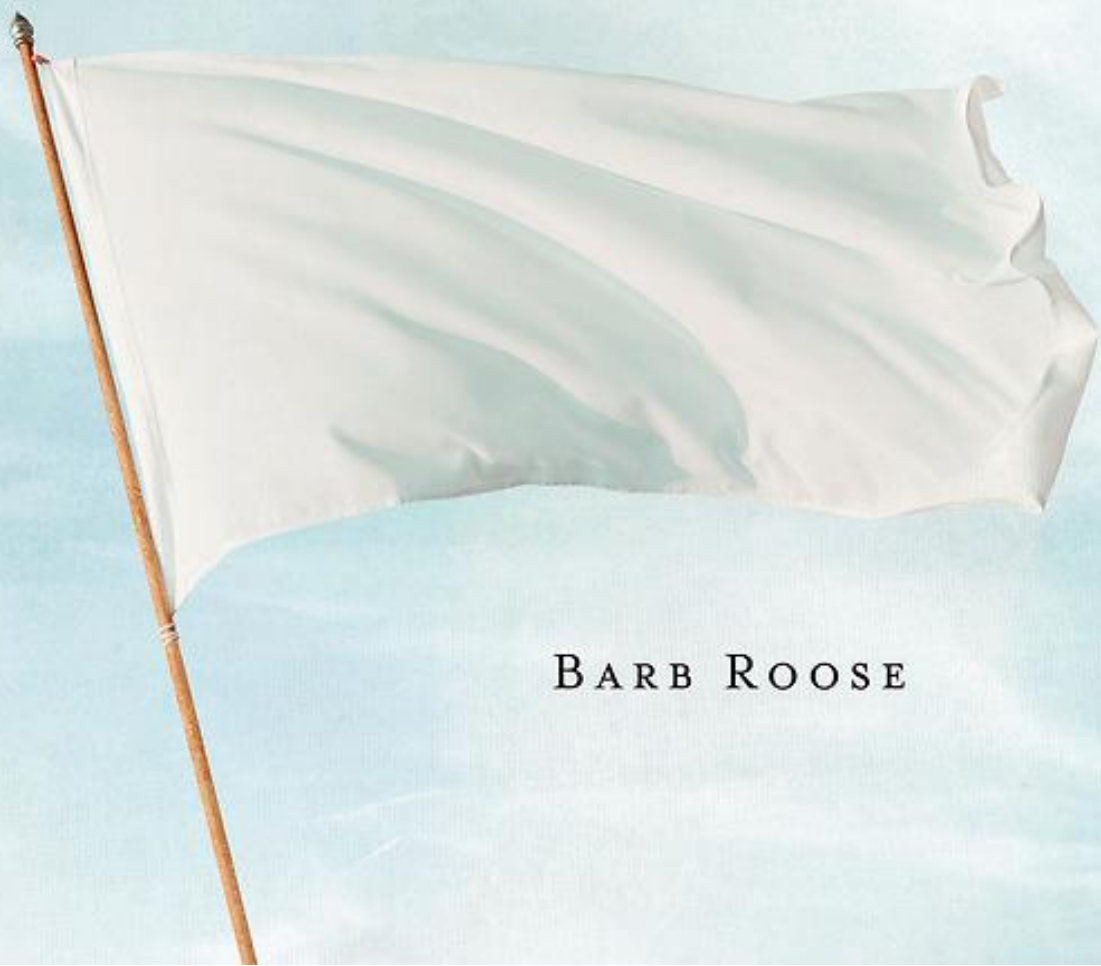


A STUDY of JESUS in the WILDERNESS

Surrendered

Letting Go & Living Like Jesus



BARB ROOSE

Praise for *Surrendered*

In this study, you'll be learning from a friend who is familiar with the painful parts of life and a guide who has traveled the hard road of surrender. She won't lead you astray; she'll lead you straight to the heart of God.

—**Tiffany Bluhm**, speaker, podcaster, and author of *She Dreams*

Surrendered is the antidote for women like me who struggle with the dreaded c-word, control. Through rich biblical teaching, vulnerable personal stories, and gentle (but insistent) beckoning, Barb Roose leads us to a new place of freedom through trust in God. Finally . . . we can learn to release our white-knuckled grip and rest.

—**Amy Carroll**, Proverbs 31 Ministries speaker and writer, author of *Breaking Up with Perfect* and *Exhale*

With clear biblical insights and practical steps, Barb helps us envision the freedom available to us and then walk into that freedom. I highly recommend this study to anyone feeling stuck or needing a breakthrough in any area of their life (which is all of us!).

—**Deb Gruelle**, best-selling author and speaker

Barb speaks as a wise Bible teacher and as a friend who fully understands the deepest places of hurt in your heart. I am so thankful for this study that not only leads women to God's peace, power, and provision but also offers a guide who holds your hand as you walk together

—**Katy McCown**, Proverbs 31 writer and founder of And She Laughs Ministries

*In this six-week journey of *Surrendered*, we will learn six key principles of relinquishing and receiving with Barb Roose as our dynamic guide through personal story, in-depth exposition, and contagious passion. Dive in for faith and freedom!*

—**Lucinda Secrest McDowell**, author of *Soul Strong* and *Dwelling Places*

Barb's surrender principles free us from the need to control others and from anger or frustration over life's disappointing and hurtful circumstances. As a Bible study teacher, I highly recommend this study.

—**Janet Holm McHenry**, best-selling author of twenty-four books including *Prayer-Walk* and *The Complete Guide to the Prayers of Jesus*

As a Christian counselor, I often see women struggling with fear and anxiety with circumstances beyond their control. Surrendered provides biblical and practical ways to escape the fight, flight, or freeze traps that seem almost unavoidable in our world today.

—**Michelle Nietert**, clinical director, Community Counseling Associates

This study is full of transformative principles to free you from the grip of control. Whether you are tempted to flee difficult circumstances, fix outcomes, or force your way forward, Barb lays out a clear path to experience God's lasting peace, power, and provision as you live surrendered to Him.

—**Katie M. Reid**, author of *Made Like Martha*, Bible teacher, and host of *The Martha + Mary Show* podcast

With vivid storytelling and deep study of Scripture, Surrendered offers a shame-free, practical, and hope-filled journey through struggles and into life. This study provides a toolkit for life in our inevitable wildernesses.

—**Jane Rubietta**, speaker and award-winning author of *Heartbreak of a Mother*, *Finding Your Dream*, and many other titles

When facing tough times one of the hardest things to figure out is what to hold on to and what to let go. If you need help, this study is for you. May its words give you the grace to surrender your all to One who rescues those in the midst of trouble.

—**Susan Seay**, speaker and author of *The Intentional Parent: Parenting on Purpose When Life Gets Busy*

Barb gently leads us to the core truths about Christ and His character. She has a gift for shining light on who God is—and because of who He is, how we can live freely surrendered to the Spirit's leading.

—**Amy Seiffert**, speaker and author of *Grace Looks Good on You*

Barb is a fellow struggler and overcomer who gets down on her knees with you and jumps for joy when you win, sharing freely how God has helped her win in so many of life's difficulties. She gets it. She lives it. This is a study for every woman who knows pain and wants peace.

—**Tami Ward**, Central Women's Pastor, Discovery Church, Orlando, Florida

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Abingdon Women/Nashville

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my Jesus-loving sister with the weary soul,
you are not alone in your struggle.
God knows the weight that you carry.
He hears the cry of your heart.
You are seen. Most of all,
you are dearly loved.

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About the Author

Barb Roose is a popular speaker and author who is passionate about connecting women to one another and to God, and helping them apply the truths of God's Word to the practical realities and challenges they face as women in today's culture. Barb enjoys teaching and encouraging women at conferences and events across the country, as well as internationally. She is the author of the Bible studies *I'm Waiting, God: Finding Blessing in God's Delays*; *Joshua: Winning the*

Worry Battle; and *Beautiful Already: Reclaiming God's Perspective on Beauty* and the books *Winning the Worry Battle: Life Lessons from the Book of Joshua* and *Enough Already: Winning Your Ugly Struggle with Beauty*. She also writes a regular blog at BarbRoose.com and hosts the "Better Together" podcast. Previously Barb was executive director of ministry at CedarCreek Church in Perrysburg, Ohio, where she served on staff for fourteen years and co-led the annual Fabulous Women's Conference that reached more than ten thousand women over five years. Barb is the proud mother of three adult daughters and lives in Northwest Ohio.

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Blog BarbRoose.com (check here for event dates and booking information)



Introduction

Does your life feel like more than you can handle right now?

Take a deep breath, friend. It's okay to not be okay right now. The good news is that God has a better way for you to get through whatever it is that you're going through.

Perhaps you picked up this study because you or someone you love is in the midst of a difficult struggle. There's something or someone in your life that you're worried about, and while you know that you can't change it, that hasn't stopped you from trying. And after all of your begging, pleading, paying, and praying, you're worn out. Not just tired, but your heart may resemble a raggedy blanket, shredded and torn over and over again. Yet there's still that little determined fire within you that desperately longs to fix what's broken.

Our natural desire is to protect ourselves and what we love, fix what's broken, and make sure that everyone and everything in our lives stays on track. Life is happy and feels good when the bills are paid, the kids make good decisions, and that last twenty pounds drops off with a few months of diet and exercise.

But what happens when life doesn't go as planned? What do you do when you can't protect yourself or what you love, fix what's broken, or prevent the future from falling off the tracks?

As much as we know that we don't have control over our circumstances, there's often this little voice in our mind that whispers, "If you work hard enough, smart enough, and long enough, you can fix this." Have you ever heard that voice? I have. And for a very long time, I believed that philosophy. In fact, there were lots of times when I didn't pray about some problems. Why pray when I didn't think that I needed God's help? For others of us, we don't want to fix as much as we just want to flee—to return to a time when things were as they used to be. We might be so busy trying to ignore the situation or escape from it that we don't take time to pray. Or we might be banging on the door of heaven with our pleas for God to stop what's happening and make everything right again.

In my own life, a situation unfolded in our family that was far beyond my ability to manage, and soon our lives spiraled out of control. The more out of control I felt, the more buttons and levers I tried to push. I worked twice as hard and devoted double the

resources. I just knew that if I stuck in there long enough, I could fix all of it. However, as I kept fighting year after year, I felt mounting fear and frustration because what I loved was slipping away and I was powerless to stop it.

As a Jesus-loving woman, it was hard to acknowledge my control-loving ways. Instead, I pictured my efforts as creative or proactive problem-solving. Sadly, I ignored the possibility that I was just trying to play God in my life and the lives of others.

The moment of change for me came when I stopped being afraid to let go and trust God with whatever happened, even when God moved my life in a different or difficult direction. I finally admitted that the weight of my problems was too much for me to bear. I realized that the harder I held on, the heavier the weight became, breaking my heart over and over again. Everything changed when I decided to let go and let God carry the weight as well as work out what would come next.

Whether your tendency, like mine, is to try to control and fix problems, or you're more inclined to try to escape them or beg God to change things, the bottom line is that painful circumstances are *hard*. If you're facing a situation where you're feeling powerless, afraid, desperate, or alone, I'm glad that you're here for this *Surrendered* Bible study. As we journey together for the next six weeks, you'll have the opportunity to apply God's precious promises to the fears deep in your heart as well as learn helpful tools to reshape your attitudes and behaviors into responses that reflect how Jesus responded in difficult circumstances.

During this study, you'll follow Jesus into the Judean wilderness where He was tempted by the devil. We'll explore the wilderness as a metaphor for those long seasons of life when we face hardships and difficulties that test and challenge our faith. As we look at how Jesus faces a set of three temptations, we'll compare His responses to the Israelites, who also faced a long wilderness season centuries before. Throughout the study, you'll explore how the Israelites' lack of faith made their time in the wilderness painful; yet still they experienced God's power and blessing in their lives. Whether you're facing a long wilderness season or dealing with a difficult or destructive temptation, Jesus understands what you're going through. You are not alone. There's hope, even if today you feel like you are at the end of your rope!

If there was a word that captured Jesus' posture in the wilderness, that word would be *surrender*. Jesus didn't fight to strong-arm evil intentions or escape challenging circumstances; rather, Jesus surrendered to and flowed with God's Spirit within Him. Even in His weakened human state, Jesus stood strong against Satan, something that we'd all like to do. As we trace Jesus' footsteps in the wilderness, you'll learn from His words as well as His actions. There will be lots of reflection exercises, tools, and surrender principles for you to apply in your life.

The act of surrender is an invitation to release our problems to God and receive His provision, protection, and peace in return. The pursuit of living the surrendered life will involve allowing God to transform your head (beliefs), your heart (emotions), and your

hands (actions). The goal of this study is to equip you to begin the process of letting go—which is not giving in out of fear or giving up out of discouragement, but giving over whatever you are facing to God and living each day with the faith that God is in control and the hope that God is working everything not only for your good but also the good of those you love and care about.

Surrender Principles

Learning to let go and live like Jesus isn't a switch that we can flip. Whether you're a control-loving fixer like me or someone whose tendency is to flee or escape the problem or the pain, unlearning those behaviors is a challenge. Not only do you have to evict either the "you can fix it" squatter or the "stop the pain now" bully from your mind but you also have to flood the fear-based circuitry of your heart with God's truth and promises.

One way to do this is to develop a practice of repeating a set of six surrender principles before you begin each day's study, as well as activating one or more of these principles whenever fear flows through your heart or you're tempted to flee, fix, or force situations.

1. I am not in control of others or outcomes.
2. I choose to live by faith, not rush to follow my feelings.
3. I can always let go and give my problems to God.
4. Trusting God's promises will bless me, but pushing my plans will stress me.
5. When fear tempts me to flee, fix, or force my way, I will choose to stop and pray.
6. Surrender is my only path to God's peace, power, and provision.

These principles are designed to be short but memorable. You can write them on a note card and place them in your wallet, program them into your phone, or post them anywhere as a reminder to let go and let God carry the weight for what you can't change or control.

Getting Started

Each week there are five lessons combining study of Scripture with reflection and application. As part of the study content, you'll find Extra Insights; a weekly Memory Verse; a Daily Surrender Prayer (Weeks 2–6); and short, memorable Surrender Statements to stock your *Surrendered* toolbox.

Space is provided for recording your responses and completing exercises. Throughout the study there are practical exercises that will provide you with real-time opportunities for reflection and create next-step action plans for your life, whether that might be working on a spiritual breakthrough, destroying a mental stronghold, or following through with a Spirit-led act of obedience that God may be asking you to do.

Each daily lesson should take about twenty to thirty minutes. You'll need a Bible, a pen, and an open heart that is ready to receive whatever God might speak or reveal about your surrender struggle. These lessons will help you prepare for the discussion and activities of your weekly session, if you are meeting with a group. Though you can do the study individually and reap benefits, it is designed to be done with a group for encouragement, support, and accountability. As you gather to watch the *Surrendered* DVD, you also will have the opportunity to share what you are learning and pray together.

Each video message is designed to follow and complement the content that you have studied during the week. Whether or not your group watches the video, it's so helpful to share your struggles and victories in your journey to surrender. As you do, you'll encourage one another and find strength to complete the study and put into practice all that you're learning.

A Final Word

Friend, there will always be circumstances out of our control, and the only path to God's power, peace, and provision in the midst of those circumstances is to surrender. Letting go and living like Jesus will sustain us, strengthen us, and set us up to experience God's best and beautiful blessings, not only in this life but also in the life to come.



Week 1

Waking Up in the Wilderness

(Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1)

Memory Verse

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

(James 1:2-3)



My limp, exhausted body stretched out across my cold kitchen floor. My slippery, wet cheek pressed against the slightly sticky vinyl tile floor as tears puddled around my chin.

Moments before I was on the phone with the insurance company, begging them to cover the cost of a screening test that one of my children needed, but I couldn't afford. A company representative listened to my pleas, but ended the call after politely but firmly stating that there was no coverage for the medical test.

For several years I had feared some developmental problems and as a good mama, I wanted to find answers and someone to help me fix the problem. Instead of answers, a heavy weight of anxiety, desperation, and frustration pressed me to the floor. I hung up the phone and realized that I had no other levers to pull, no moves to make, or chips to play in trying to meet an important need in my child's life.

In addition to the fears over my daughter's development issues, I had other problems. So many problems! It seemed like changes and challenges attacked me from all sides of life. What happened to me? Only a few years back, my life felt like I'd won one of those golden tickets from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Easy years flowed around career successes, flourishing relationships, and financial security. Then, like a series of fast-falling dominoes, everything that flourished seemed to fall down or fall apart. I didn't notice at first. But as those sources of security and happiness began to disappear, I began to feel desperate and discouraged.

As I lay on my kitchen floor that day, I felt like my life was at a low as my heart fell to the ground. *How did I get here? How do I get out?* That day, I looked up and demanded, "God, I want my old life back!"

While I wanted to return to what I knew, God was moving my life toward His best for my life. But it meant that I'd have to let go of my plans.

Day 1: Waking Up in the Wilderness

One day you feel like you're on the top of the world. The next day it feels like the world has fallen on top of you.

No one's life is perfect. But there are times when it seems like the wind is at your back and everything is falling into place. Perhaps after years of hard work, you finally bought

the house, landed the dream job, emptied the nest, or said “I do.” Then, just when you finally felt like exhaling, something unexpected and shocking took your breath away. Perhaps it was a dramatic moment like finding drugs in your child’s backpack, losing a job, or discovering a spouse’s dishonesty.

If you’ve ever felt like your old life has disappeared and you’re desperate to go and get it back, I’m glad that you’re here.

We’ll begin our study adventure by following Jesus from a spiritual mountaintop experience in His life into a period of suffering in a stark wilderness.

In His first public appearance, Jesus goes into the wilderness area where John the Baptist is preaching and asks to be baptized (Matthew 3:13). At first, John tries to talk Him out of it, but Jesus submits to baptism to set the example for His later command that believers be baptized (see Matthew 28:19-20).

Read Matthew 3:16-17. Draw a line to match each word on the left with the appropriate word(s) on the right.

Jesus

Descending like a dove

God

Baptized

Holy Spirit

Spoke from heaven

Consider the power of that moment! I don’t know about you, but I would have loved to witness Jesus’ baptism. During the years I served on staff at my local church, I watched thousands of baptisms, and each one moved my heart. But watching Jesus get baptized? That would be more than my mind could handle!

On top of that, imagine seeing the Spirit of God descend like a dove, landing on Jesus’ head. Another holy moment! To top it all off, what would it have been like to hear God’s voice from heaven express His delight in Jesus?

In this moment, it seemed like everything in Jesus’ life had come together. He’d taken a faithful step of obedience and experienced the immediate presence and loving affirmation of God.

Spiritual mountaintop moments aren’t the proof of God’s love or favor, but they are memorable moments that remind us of a time when we felt a special connection to God.

Can you recall a spiritual mountaintop moment in your life? If you can’t think of a spiritual moment, list one or two favorite moments in your life.

Some of my spiritual mountaintop moments include a powerful church camp experience in junior high when I really felt connected to God, repenting in college after a season of straying far from God, and watching my girls get baptized at different times in their childhood.

There's a reason why we refer to them as mountaintop moments because they are special moments for us to remember, but no one lives in mountaintop moments. In fact, Jesus is about to experience a dramatic change in circumstances.

In screenwriting terms, Jesus is about to experience what's called a "smash cut" where one scene transitions suddenly to another.¹

Look up Matthew 4:1 and write out the verse below:

Read Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1 in the margin. Record any additional details not mentioned in Matthew 4:1.

Now that's a dramatic change!

While it's hard to pinpoint exactly where Jesus was in the wilderness, scholars believe that Jesus was in the Wilderness of Judea. This hilly area in Judah bordered the Dead Sea.²

Most translations of Matthew 4:1 use the word *wilderness* to describe Jesus' surroundings, but occasionally the word *desert* is used.³ The writer Mark covers Jesus' sojourn into the wilderness in two verses. However, Mark is the only Gospel writer who makes reference to wild animals wandering around the wilderness with Jesus. Older translations refer to the animals as "wild beasts." Scholars speculate these beasts may have been animals such as bears, wolves, panthers, or even a lion.⁴ While the wild animals may have represented a visible threat to Jesus, they kept to themselves.

Based on what we read in the text, the wilderness was an isolated, rugged environment away from the comforts of home. Picture a camping trip, but without any of the equipment. Camping this way is possible, but definitely not comfortable. The wilderness is described as "land not suitable for farming."⁵ However, wilderness conditions did offer enough vegetation for wild animals to graze.

Examples of Spiritual Mountaintop Moments

- *Feeling a connection to God for the first time*
- *Realizing God loves you unconditionally*
- *Accepting Jesus into your heart*
- *Forgiving a long-standing hurt or offense*
- *Experiencing victory over a sin or struggle*
- *Seeing the answer to a prayer or witnessing a miracle*

¹²The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. (Mark 1:12-13 ESV)

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. (Luke 4:1 ESV)

Based on what you read about the wilderness, describe or draw a picture of what Jesus might have seen around Him.

The wilderness is a symbol of hardship and difficulty. In our study, you'll learn about a number of people who endured wilderness seasons such as the Israelites, Moses, Elijah, and Paul. You may have heard someone refer to a "wilderness season" or a period of time when life is hard or heartbreaking. Below I have defined some general characteristics of a spiritual wilderness. I don't know where you're at today, but if you know or realize that you're in a wilderness season, my heart is with you. As I write this study, I've been in a long wilderness season, so I'm *honored* to be walking alongside you!

A spiritual wilderness can be characterized as:

1. a long-lasting situation that seems to hit the "pause" button in your life,
2. a high-stakes situation where someone's or something's future is at risk,
3. a time when there are no quick fixes and you have little control over the timing or outcome,
4. an experience of losing satisfaction or pleasure in once pleasurable things, or
5. a season when a circumstance is causing either emotional or spiritual confusion, or both.

Is there or has there been a time period in your life that fits the definition of a spiritual wilderness? If so, what were some of the circumstances that defined your wilderness season?

Wilderness seasons are triggered by change. Do you like change? I do, but only if I'm the one in charge of making the change. When change isn't my idea, then I'm going to go kicking and screaming.

Read Matthew 4:1 again. Who led Jesus into the wilderness? Why?

What stands out to me in Matthew 4:1 is that the Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness. I don't know about you, but I don't like change if it's going to make my life harder. In fact, I'll fight any change that might lead to hardship or heartache. Yet Jesus went willingly. He went for a purpose so that you and I could learn how to find hope and help in our wilderness seasons.

How do you feel about change?

In both major wilderness seasons in my adult life, the tidal wave of change has overwhelmed me. Whether I struggled against adjustments in career, shifts in personal relationships, or a transition in how I saw my personal identity, my early wilderness prayers tended to beg God to put my life back to what was familiar and comfortable.

One thing I like to remember is that when the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, Jesus didn't go alone. Whatever it is you are facing today, you aren't facing it alone. Even if you feel abandoned right now, God is close by. Even when you feel like the weight of your fears, problems, or pain is beyond your ability to bear it, God sees you and He hasn't left you alone!

Memory Verse Reflection

At the end of Day 1 each week, you will have an opportunity to reflect on the week's Memory Verse. (For simplicity we're calling it Memory Verse, though sometimes there are one or more verses.) I have selected verses that reflect the theme of each week of study and that will uplift and encourage your heart.

Here is this week's Memory Verse:

²⁻⁴Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.

(James 1:2-4 MSG)

Extra Insight

The Book of James is traditionally attributed to Jesus' brother James, who wasn't a disciple until after Jesus' resurrection. James was a leader in the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15:4-21).

What happens to our faith when we experience pressure from challenges and troubles?

What is the blessing that comes from being spiritually mature and well-developed (or more like Christ)?

Going through hard seasons is tough! However, this week's Memory Verse highlights an important lesson for us to remember about how God doesn't waste any experience in our lives. Now, let's make it more personal.

Fill in the first blank with your name and the second blank with whatever you are facing:

²*Consider it pure joy, _____, whenever you face _____,*

³*because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.*
(James 1:2-3)

Prayer

Dear God, You know that I'm facing a variety of challenges in life. Today I choose to trust that You are with me through each and every one of those challenges and that You will use them to make me more faithful and trusting of You. Amen.

Day 2: Trusting God's Heart in Hard Times

A few years ago I asked a group of people in my office to do trust falls with one another. A trust fall is where you stand with your back to another person and fall backward with the expectation that he or she will catch you. When I did this with my coworkers, there were some interesting results.

A few people, including me, managed to fall back. It felt uncomfortable to voluntarily give up control, but it was exhilarating to experience the sensation of being caught by another person. Only one person absolutely refused to participate. I appreciate this person's honest response: "Nope, I do not trust any of you to catch me."

While that response may seem harsh, there are times when I have the same attitude toward God as I'm working hard to try to fix a situation. When I'm

running around trying to do everything on my own, I'm challenged to ask myself if I have trust issues with God. Why do I struggle to let go and let God deal with things?

Can you relate?

My definition of *trust* is having confidence that someone or something is reliable and will not fail us. When my girls ask me for help, I want them to have confidence that they can trust me and that I will do what I promised them I would do.

Do you have the confidence that God is reliable and won't fail you or those you love? This is a vital question that we wrestle with in wilderness seasons. As much as you might want to say that you trust God in hard times, you're not alone if you've secretly questioned God's heart toward you. As a wise friend bravely admitted, "I pray and I want to trust God, but in the back of my mind I wonder if He might end up giving me a whammy instead of a blessing."

When life looks and feels good, we might put aside some of our hard questions about God. But wilderness seasons put pressure on what we believe and how we live. The emotional force of long-term unemployment, a major health diagnosis, or an explosive marriage crisis pushes our belief buttons, exposing the places where we're not sure if we really believe that God is with us or for us.

When you're facing a wilderness or hard season, how do you see God?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ I see God as compassionate, helpful, and loving toward me.
- ☐ I know that God loves me, but I often question whether or not He will give me the deepest desire of my heart.
- ☐ I want to believe that God loves me, but a lot of things have happened to make me feel otherwise.
- ☐ I'm afraid that God will punish me for the mistakes I've made, so I don't even expect God will want to bless me.

Other:

What are the situations when you tend to struggle to trust God?

Thousands of years before Christ, the Israelites left Egypt and entered the wilderness, now known as the Sinai Peninsula. After over four hundred years of slavery, the Israelites were freed in a spectacular escape through the Red Sea before entering the wilderness on a journey toward Canaan, the land God promised to them. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness mirrors the Israelites' wilderness wandering years. As we study accounts from both the Old and New Testaments over the next six weeks, we'll learn not only from Jesus' faithful example but also from some of the missteps that the Israelites made in their struggle to trust God in the wilderness. Rather than pity or even scoff at their mistakes, let's allow their experience to guide us toward faithful rather than fearful living.

Today we'll consider three insights we can gain from the Israelites' early experience in the wilderness that will help us remember God's heart toward us when life takes a turn into a wilderness season.

Read Exodus 16:1-4 and answer the following questions.

How long had the Israelites been in the wilderness?

What were the people complaining about?

Even though the Israelites spent over four hundred years in slavery, they were ready to go back to their harsh living conditions after less than two months in the wilderness. Coincidentally, the Israelites were in an area known as the Wilderness of Sin. Hunger made them forget that God had freed them from Pharaoh, had their Egyptian neighbors give them all kinds of parting gifts, and had made possible a dramatic exit through the Red Sea. All of that was forgotten once the people got hungry, grumpy, and afraid. Suddenly, Egypt didn't seem so bad.

The people had forgotten that back in Egypt, Pharaoh had worked them mercilessly (Exodus 5:10-14) and they cried out for help (Exodus 3:7). Now they were free—though unhappy and grumpy. Yet God already had a plan to take care of them.

Read Exodus 16:4-5. How did God say that He would provide food for the Israelites? (v. 4)

How much were the people to gather on the sixth day?

Extra Insight

*"The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey."
(Exodus 16:31)*

You may be familiar with God's provision of manna for the Israelites. In fact, God provided manna from heaven for the entire forty-year journey (Exodus 16:35), even providing for His people in the midst of their faithlessness, rebellion, and fear. This leads us to an important insight into God's heart when we find ourselves in a wilderness season.

Wilderness Insight #1: God takes care of His children at all times, including hard times.

God created a perfect world, but our sin has caused brokenness and pain. As Romans 3:23 reminds us, all of us have fallen short of God's perfect standard at one time or another. In our world, good people sin and bad things sometimes happen to good people. Wilderness seasons of hardship and heartache are a natural consequence of our fallen and sinful world.

God isn't powerless in our pain. He restores, redeems, provides, and empowers us to live through, above, and beyond our circumstances. We'll see how this unfolds as we continue to explore the Israelites' journey in the wilderness. Best of all, God's faithfulness doesn't depend on us.

While it might seem that God is rewarding the Israelites for complaining by sending manna, He's actually fulfilling the promise that He made to take care of them. God promises to take care of us, too, but how often do we get anxious because we don't trust God's heart toward us?

Jesus addresses this issue in the Sermon on the Mount.

Read Matthew 6:25-32.

What are we told not to worry about? (v. 25)

How can we know that we can trust God? (v. 26)

Why does Jesus say that only pagans (nonbelievers) worry about what they will eat and drink? (vv. 31-32)

No matter what season of life you are in, how has God been taking care of and providing for you?

How does Jesus' teaching challenge your questions about whether or not God will provide for you or a loved one in a challenging situation?

When we're not sure if we can trust God, that's when we tend to take matters into our own hands. If we don't trust that God can rescue our children or loved ones, we're likely to twist ourselves inside out to try to save them from bad decisions or shape them into our image of who we think they should be. I spent many years of my own daughters' lives as a helicopter parent, swooping down to try to save them from bad choices or decisions.

However, there's an important lesson we can learn from the Israelites when we face hard times and insist on living our way rather than following God's way.

Read Exodus 16:16-20, and answer T (True) or F (False):

- _____ **1. God instructed the people to gather three omers per person. (v. 16)**
- _____ **2. The Israelites followed God's directions in gathering the manna (v. 17)**
- _____ **3. Moses instructed the people not to keep the manna overnight. (v. 19)**
- _____ **4. Leftover manna ended up with maggots the next morning. (v. 20)**

God provided manna for each day; not only that, but God also provided enough for everyone. The people didn't have to stand in the grocery store line or even pay for the food. They collected what they needed each morning for the day. This is reminiscent of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:11 when he prays, "Give us today our daily bread."

Yet there were some who didn't trust that God would provide the next day. Or maybe they figured that they would collect a little extra in case they wanted a midnight snack or God wouldn't provide enough in the future. We can have that mindset as well. This leads to the next wilderness insight.

Wilderness Insight #2: God provides what you need for today.

Here's the thing: Our attempts to fix the future often go badly. There's nothing wrong with saving for the future, unless the reason for saving is a question or fear that God won't provide.

There was a time when my obsession with planning ahead led to a lot of stockpiling and buying extra. However, a lot of waste also happened because we couldn't use all that I was buying. Then, in a wilderness season a few decades ago, I began practicing what I still call "My Principle of Daily Bread," which is, *I have enough for today. God will take care of what I need tomorrow.*

As a former obsessive planner, that wilderness season forced me to let go of trying to stockpile for the future out of fear or needing to make sure that I was comfortable. Instead, I discovered that God was a much better supplier than the grocery store—and best of all, God doesn't waste!

I love how Jesus sums this up for us:

Look up Matthew 6:34, and write it below:

Again, there's nothing wrong with having life insurance, savings accounts, or retirement funds. However, Jesus doesn't want us obsessing about what God has promised to provide.

What are some of the bad outcomes or fears about tomorrow that you should stop worrying about?

Have some of your efforts been "spoiled" in the form of strained relationships or weakened health from stress or high anxiety?

Look again at Matthew 6:34. Why does Jesus say that worry about tomorrow isn't productive?

Throughout the Bible, there are many times when God instructs His people to either build memorials or keep mementos of His faithfulness to tell the story to future generations. God instructs Moses to collect a container of manna for a specific reason.

Read Exodus 16:32. Why does God want Moses to collect a jar of manna?

Our memories are short! God knows that when hard times are over, we tend to forget how He got us through them. Not only would God supernaturally preserve the manna; that jar of supernatural food would be pulled out and talked about so that future generations would know God took care of His people, even though they didn't always follow Him faithfully.

Manna is a symbol and a promise of supernatural provision that we have nothing to do with. Just like the Israelites woke up each day and God provided food, so there are many places in our lives where God has provided. The question is whether or not we've been taking credit for it. Did God supernaturally provide a job at just the right time? Did you meet someone and that connection led to an unexpected blessing in your life? This leads us to today's final wilderness insight.

Wilderness Insight #3: The more you remember God's promises and provision, the less afraid you need to be in the wilderness.

Read the following verses, and match each verse to the correct description of God's character, heart, or action toward you.

Jeremiah 29:11	God will supply all of your needs.
Jeremiah 31:1	God gives you everything you need to live for Him.
Philippians 4:19	God's plans for you are good, not evil.
2 Peter 1:3	God is love.
1 John 4:8	God will always love you.

What are one or two takeaways from today's study about God's heart toward you and whatever you're facing today?

Prayer

God, thank You for all the times You've taken care of me during difficult seasons. As I'm thinking about all the people You've placed in my life during those times, I pray that I

am also a person who helps others during their hard times. Please use me to bless and encourage someone going through a hard time today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: Five Wilderness Trials and Three Lessons

As a kid, I looked forward to Sunday school because each week our teacher made the stories in the Bible come alive. Since we were kids, we didn't always understand what we were reading; but as we sat on those little plastic chairs in the basement of our church, our teacher used flannel board cutouts and creativity to teach us about David and Goliath, Daniel in the lions' den, and other stories. That Bible teacher was my mom. I'll never forget the day she grabbed a chair and taught us Hebrews 11:1 (KJV): "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Mom pushed the chair before us and explained that faith is a belief or confidence we have inside when we have experience with something.

"Kids, do you believe that this chair will hold me?"

"Yes," we replied in unison.

"How do you know that this chair will hold me?"

One kid yelled: "Because we've sat in chairs before!"

While this was a very simple lesson, I've held on to what my mom taught that day—and many times afterward. She wanted us to know that we develop faith when we have experiences with God. As we get to know God better, our faith gets stronger.

The wilderness is often the perfect opportunity to get to know God better, if we're willing. We could be like the Israelites and start screaming for somebody to send us back to our old ways of thinking and living. However, if we trust God's heart toward us, perhaps we're willing to embrace this week's Memory Verse and allow the stark, simple struggle of the wilderness to expose our faith-life so that God can lead us in a new direction toward experiencing more of His promises in our lives.

Today we're going to look at five kinds of trials we face in the wilderness and three lessons or promises of God to us in those struggles. To examine these trials, we're going to look at one of the most well-known stories of hardship and heartache in the Bible, and we'll conclude by embracing Jesus' powerful promise for us that brings hope and life to our hearts no matter what kind of trial we're facing.

Read Job 1:1-12 and answer True (T) or False (F):

_____ Job was described as blameless and upright. (v. 1)

_____ He had twelve sons and eight daughters. (v. 2)

_____ Job owned a lot of animals and was the most prosperous in the East. (v. 3)

_____ Satan wondered why God treated Job so badly. (v. 10)

_____ God gave Satan permission to interfere in Job's life. (v. 12)

_____ Satan was allowed to kill Job. (v. 12)

In the first verse of the Book of Job, Job is described as “blameless—a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil” (NLT). I think we all wish that we were more like Job. However, this description of Job's life and faith is helpful because it reminds us that hardship and heartache happen to everyone, including people of faith. You may be facing a trial that comes through no fault of your own. We all face hard times, and we don't need to assign blame or fault.

In verses 9-11, Satan tells God that Job has faith only because God never lets anything bad happen to him. Satan proposes that Job would curse God's face if all that he loved and protected was taken away from him.

As we read in verse 12, God gives Satan permission to test Job with the only restriction being not to harm him physically. Job receives heartbreaking news from many messengers. It's within their messages that we can see the different kinds of trials we all face in life.

Read Job 1:14-15. What does Job hear from messenger #1?

This messenger brings news that I've labeled the **Trial of Trouble**, which is upsetting or inconvenient problems in life that you can't fix.

Read Job 1:16-17. What does Job hear from messengers #2 and #3??

I've labeled the news from these messengers the **Trial of Tragedy**, which is painful circumstances arising from sudden loss, death, disaster, or evil deeds.

Read Job 1:19. What does Job hear from messenger #4?

Satan caused a great wind to come in from the wilderness and kill all of Job's children at once. That kind of loss is beyond comprehension. You may know what it's like to experience what I have labeled **Tornado Trial**, which is the emotional, relational, or financial collapse and devastation of the life that you once knew.

After the dust settled, Job had to choose how he would live and deal with the swirl of thoughts and emotions inside him. This happens for us, too. Every wilderness season includes a battle in which we must deal with chaotic thoughts and emotions. I have labeled this the **Trial of Turmoil**, which is our inner struggle for faith after suffering great pain and loss.

These are the four trials that happened to Job and that happen to us as well. There's one more trial, the **Trial of Temptation**, that we'll study tomorrow.

Which of these trials fits your life right now?

So, what does Job do? Imagine stopping by Job's house on that awful day and watching as Job responds to the devastating news.

Read Job 1:20-21. How does Job respond?

Write verse 21 below:

Job tears off his clothes and grabs the ancient version of a razor to shave his head. He isn't afraid to show his grief in the face of devastating suffering. The author of *The Gospel of Job* offers this observation:

Here we have a man who weeps publicly, who squirms, groans, shouts, beats his breast, a man in crippling pain who nevertheless summons the presence of mind to engage in serious conversation. Just think for a moment about this sort of behavior, and then consider the question, What sort of faith does such a man have? Regardless of what he says, regardless of all the doubts and confusion and anger that he gives vent to in words, what is it that his actions indicate?⁵

Perhaps Job's response can become an encouragement and inspiration for us, that we can praise God for what He's given us and still give thanks when what we had goes away. While God isn't the cause of our heartache, we can trust that He is the *only* one who knows how to bring good from our pain.

I don't know about you, but I never want to miss an opportunity for God to teach me a lesson or show me how to live with more strength and courage in challenging circumstances. While there are different kinds of trials, all trials can teach us three important lessons and we're going to explore those lessons now:

1. Trials teach us to WORSHIP GOD MORE.

When life is easy, our hearts may not beat as strongly for God because we may not feel as much need for Him. Uncomfortable circumstances motivate us to seek and worship God more.

⁵*Trust in the LORD
with all your heart
and lean not
on your own
understanding;
in all your ways
submit to him,
and he will
make your paths
straight.
(Proverbs 3:5-6)*

Read Proverbs 3:5-6 in the margin. How much of our hearts should trust God?

2. Trials can teach us to DEPEND ON OURSELVES LESS.

Trials reveal what's happening in our faith life and how often we try to live apart from God. In hard times we often realize just how much we need God.

Read Jeremiah 17:9 in the margin. What is the truth about our hearts apart from God?

*The heart is deceitful
above all things,
and desperately
sick;
who can
understand it?
(Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)*

3. Trials can teach us to BECOME MORE LIKE CHRIST.

Finally, trials can help us to become more like Christ. This is something that we cannot do on our own. You can want to be like Christ, but God's power is necessary to transform the selfish motives and directions of your heart.

This means that God has to remove what no longer serves a healthy or helpful purpose in our lives.

Read Romans 12:2 in the margin. What must we allow God to do in our lives?

What are some of the persistent spiritual battles or doubts about God that you've been fighting?

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

(Romans 12:2)

When I reflect on times of trial in my life, I realize that many of them have shined a light on fears about God's provision, my identity, or my character as a leader. God allowed circumstances to force me to uncomfortable corners where, ultimately, He brought me to a place of honesty about the gap between what I proclaimed to others about God and the fears in my own heart and mind—fears that got in the way of living out what I believed.

As this study continues, I'll share many stories about the different wilderness seasons that I've faced in life. You'll also learn about the wilderness season that I've been in while writing this study. My heart's desire is that I will continue to learn from my trials and allow God to use them to make me more and more like Jesus.

In addition to this week's Memory Verse, there are other verses that paint a powerful picture of what wilderness trials can do in our faith-life to bless us—now and in the future.

Read Romans 5:3-5 below, and underline the qualities that hard times produce in our lives.

³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

(Romans 5:3-5)

As you reflect on the three ways that God can use trials in your life for good, do any of those lessons stand out today? If so, write about it briefly:

Let's close our lesson today with Jesus' words—words we can believe because He has already accomplished through His death and resurrection what He proclaimed. So, we can stand in confidence that whatever we're facing today won't beat us. We already have victory!

Write John 16:33 below, and circle the word indicating what Jesus promises us.

Jesus acknowledges that you're going to have hard times because our world is broken. Yet He wants you to have peace, a sense of calm, and an assurance that whatever you're facing today, you aren't facing it alone. You can have peace in Him and know that He is with you and for you. Most of all, Jesus' victory over every trial is *your* victory. You may not feel victorious today, but victory is yours when you put your hand in His and walk through your wilderness with Him.

Prayer

God, I am grateful that You never waste any of the good or bad experiences in my life. As I reflect on how You use my trials to help me see You clearer, depend on myself less, and learn to be more like Christ, I pray I always remember that You love, care for, and prepare me every step of the way. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 4: What's Tempting You?

There are some powerful comparisons and contrasts between how Jesus and the Israelites handled their wilderness experience. Both Jesus and the Israelites experienced dramatic God-moments before entering the stark unknown of the wilderness. As we've seen, the Israelites began complaining and talking about going back to Egypt while Jesus humbly submitted to the Holy Spirit's leading.

As we learn from this week's Memory Verse, challenges expose our faith-life. Yesterday we studied the first four wilderness trials, and our study today is devoted to the fifth trial: temptation.

Can you imagine having to deal face-to-face with Satan for one minute or even one second? Not only did Jesus encounter Satan; the tempter brought his A game. He wanted to trip Jesus up, no doubt hoping to derail Jesus' purpose for coming to earth, which was to seek and save the lost. Jesus knew that we'd face temptation. So, Jesus wanted to show us that the power of God living within us equips us to overcome our human desires, which can get out of control.

We all face temptation. I read an article about some research conducted by a well-known company related to the top five self-reported temptations in America.⁷ According to the findings, they are the temptation to:

1. over-indulge in fear and worry,
2. procrastinate,
3. eat too much,
4. overuse electronics or social media, and
5. be lazy.

The article indicates that some temptations were reported at higher or lower rates depending on age or gender. But the author points out the bottom line of temptation, which gets at the heart of it all: "Most of the time temptation begins with something good: food, rest, God-approved sex, the need to be loved and accepted."⁸

It's not a sin to be tempted. Temptation comes in all shapes, forms, and sizes. However, the one thing we must remember is that temptation does not come from God (see James 1:3). Unfortunately, many of us have been shamed and silenced for feeling tempted. Jesus faced temptation, and He shows us the way to freedom when temptation tries to ensnare us.

Not many people love to sit around the dinner table and talk about the temptations they're facing. I'd venture to guess that you aren't excited about discussing what's wooing you away from loving God and others with the other women in your group. But we *need* to talk about temptation. It's real. It's powerful. And we all are dealing with temptation in one form or another.

Here's how I define temptation:

Temptation – *An invitation that would distract or derail our pursuit of God.*

Today we're going to look at temptation. Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness because He knew that we'd face it in our lives.

⁵In your relationships
with one another,
have the same
mindset as
Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very
nature God,
did not consider
equality with God
something to be
used to his own
advantage;
⁷rather, he made
himself nothing
by taking the very
nature of a servant,
being made in
human likeness.
(Philippians 2:5-7)

For we do not have
a high priest who is
unable to empathize
with our weaknesses,
but we have one who
has been tempted
in every way, just as
we are—yet he did
not sin.

(Hebrews 4:15)

Read Philippians 2:5-7 and Hebrews 4:15 in the margin. What do you learn about why it was necessary for Jesus to experience temptation?

Here's what one scholar wrote about why God's Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness: "Jesus was tempted so that every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might know that Jesus Christ is the Conqueror."⁹

In difficult times, it's easy to think thoughts such as, *No one could possibly understand how I feel*, or *It's not fair that I have to go through this*. Maybe you don't know of anyone in your life who is facing similar circumstances as you, but Jesus understands. Not only does Jesus empathize with our weaknesses, but according to Hebrews 4:15, He also was tempted in every way, as we are; but he did not sin. Before Christ, the Israelites relied upon high priests to offer sacrifices to God on their behalf for the forgiveness of sin. However, the high priest couldn't make sacrifices for the people until he'd made an atoning sacrifice for his own sin (Hebrews 5:3). Jesus was and is the perfect high priest because He did not sin but sacrificed Himself for our sin.

It has been said that Jesus came to earth to show us what God was like. Jesus humbly took on our human bodies and limitations (Philippians 2:5-7) so that we could see how the power of God living within us can help us overcome temptation—keeping our human desires from getting out of control.

In the first book of the Bible, we see what happened when human desire met temptation. Our world has never been the same since.

Read Genesis 2:16-17. From what tree did God tell Adam not to eat? What would happen if he did?

God's instructions were pretty straightforward. Since God had proclaimed that everything He created was very good, there were amazing options all around Adam. If I'd been in Adam's position, I would have eaten all the avocados my stomach could hold! God blessed Adam with abundance and gave him boundaries for his protection. Yet it wasn't enough.

To clarify, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil wasn't evil. There was nothing wrong with that tree. However, that tree was an invitation for Adam and Eve to trust God. God wanted Adam and Eve to trust that He had the knowledge of good and evil and they didn't need to know it.

Read Genesis 3:1. What question does the serpent ask Eve?

Read Genesis 3:2-4 and answer the following:

How does Eve's response differ from God's instructions to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17?

How does the serpent contradict God's instructions? (v. 4)

Much of our focus on temptation is external. We categorize people, things, or places as temptations. But the reality is that all forms of temptation begin when we question God's heart and whether or not He cares about our happiness and security.

Notice how Eve mixed and mashed up God's instructions. God told Adam not to eat from the tree. Eve embellished and added that God told them not to *touch* it. While the addition of another requirement is subtle, warping God's instructions often opens the door to warping our perception of God's heart.

Once our perception of God's love for us is warped, we fall prey to tempting enticements that promise to give us what we think God will not.

Read Genesis 3:5-6. How does the serpent contradict God's proclamation?

Verse 6 describes what happens next. What is the shift in Eve's mindset?

I shudder at these words in verse 6 (NLT): "The woman was convinced." What did Eve question about God's heart that sent her down the slippery slope of believing the serpent's lie? I must turn this question on myself. How many times have I been convinced that God didn't want what I really wanted, so I stretched my hands out, forcing or finding my own solutions?

It's not a sin to be tempted, so you don't have to beat yourself up for feeling the pull or pressure toward someone or something that is less than God's best for you. Here's a provocative question: what if your temptation is trying to expose you to areas where you're struggling to trust God's heart for you? Here are three insights about temptation that may depressurize or demagnetize temptation's effect on you so that you can break free and run back toward God's best for you and others.

Temptation Insight #1: Temptation starts with our minds, not our actions.

What's so hard about temptation for us? What are some of the lies we can believe about a temptation?

The crazy thing is that the serpent never forced the fruit into Adam and Eve's hands but only suggested they eat it. When I think about the cookies that sit on my kitchen counter, I realize they aren't bothering anybody. The object of our temptation isn't our problem. Our trust issues toward God are the problem.

Temptation Insight #2: We're often tempted by what we think God won't give us another way.

Look at the top five temptations at the beginning of today's study (page 33). Do any of those temptations ever pop up in your life? If so, write about it briefly:

How often do our fears and worries about our relationships tempt us to fix or force solutions that either manipulate others or cheat us out of God's best for us? Adam and Eve grabbed on to their temptation and, in one bite, they wrecked their mortal souls.

As devastating as Adam and Eve's sin is, God reveals His compassionate heart toward His fallen creation—even though there would be consequences that would continue through all generations.

Read Genesis 3:16. What are the two punishments that God gives to Eve?

1.

2.

This leads us to our next temptation insight.

Temptation Insight #3: If you've felt a strong pull to fix or have things your own way, there's a spiritual root for that tendency.

What are some of the people, places, or things that you try to fix, force, or control?

Extra Insight

Control-loving behaviors attempt to fix the future or force behaviors. I've summed up those control-loving behaviors in the SHINE acronym:

Stonewalling (being silent or running away),
Helicopter (micromanaging or overprotecting),
Interrupting,
Nagging, and
Excessive stockpiling or planning.

Okay, if you've gone through childbirth, you might be feeling a little salty toward Eve right now. Though we have the option of pain-numbing medicines to offset the pain of childbirth, if we want that option, unfortunately, there's no medication that keeps us from desiring to push for power over authority.

I don't know what you know about this second consequence, but it's something that I think about often. There's a desire inside me that I can't explain, but it's a little voice that often sounds like "I can fix this" or "I can fix *them*." Even if your tendency is not to control, we all struggle in one way or another with the desire for things to go our way.

Again, we all deal with temptation. For years I've battled the temptation to use comfort food as a soothing substitute instead of turning to God in times of sadness. Other times I've battled the temptation to pursue career success instead of finding my significance in God. While I love social media, I've had to battle the temptation to keep it from stealing my Bible study or prayer time with God.

Temptation is real. It can feel like a gravitational pull that sometimes we're not completely sure we want to fight. We can feel it, but we're not defenseless against it.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure.

(1 Corinthians 10:13)

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 in the margin. When you're tempted, what does God do for you?

How has God provided a way out for you when you've been tempted?

One of the best defenses against temptation is to avoid it before it can tempt you. Is there something or someone in your life that tempts you away from God's best for you? What are some ways that you can put boundaries into your life to keep yourself far away from temptation?

In Christian circles, whenever we talk about temptation, topics around sex and pornography usually pop up. However, there are related emotional temptations that need to be addressed as well.

For example, I worked on staff at my local church for many years; and early in my career, our founding senior pastor introduced a set of ten guidelines for staff interactions. In our context, men and women who were not married to each other were advised against sharing intimate marriage details with each other. I also chose to refrain from meeting one-on-one with a married man in a private space. While I wasn't concerned about getting involved in an inappropriate relationship, I wanted to protect myself from the trappings of temptation because it often occurs when we least expect it. Similar emotional temptations can occur in almost every area of our lives.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

(James 5:16)

Read James 5:16 in the margin. What happens when you talk about your struggles?

The truth of this verse is so powerful because confession actually brings healing. We can be confident that when we confess our sins, God will forgive us (1 John 1:9), but it is in sharing our sins and struggles with one another that we find healing. I am so grateful for my Christian counselors, Bible study

groups, spiritual sisters, and accountability partner. With so many people in my life to share my struggles with, I have experienced healing in so many ways! The inverse is also true: when we hide our problems, we end up bringing more pain into our lives. Over the years I've found that one of the best ways to get to the heart of the matter and short-circuit the pull of temptation is to talk with a trusted Christian friend.

Is there a truth or a verse from our study today that is resonating strongly in your heart right now? If so, write it below.

Is there a situation or area where you aren't sure that God will do what's best for you? Is there someone or something that promises to "fill in" where you are worried that God will let you down?

I don't know what you're dealing with today, but if you are facing temptation on a big or small scale, there's hope! Whether you are tempted to reply to those flirty texts from the attractive married person in your office, are binge eating, or are not reporting the undeserved extra money in your retirement check, today is the last day that you need to allow temptation to draw you farther away from God's best in your life. Pray today and ask God for help! Remember the promise found in 1 Corinthians 10:13, because God will provide a way out for you.

Prayer

Dear God, thank You for Your heart of love and good plans for me. As I reflect on the temptations in my life, help me to turn my eyes away from those temptations and choose to trust Your love and heart toward me. During tough times, it's hard to keep that perspective, but I choose to believe this today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 5: Will You Give In, Give Up, or Let Go?

Years ago I participated in an arm wrestling contest. Not because I had a dream of being a professional arm wrestler or anything like that. In fact, it was Children's Day in Honduras, and the church hosting our missions team planned a fun day of family activities, including "mom arm wrestling."

I sat down opposite my Honduran friend, Patti. Her then-teenaged daughter stood cheering in the background. My daughters were back in the US, so a few of the Honduran kids pretended that I was their mom and cheered for me.

Patti and I propped our elbows on the white folding table and giggled while clasping hands. The last time that I arm wrestled was...never. But dozens of kids, missions team members, and others stood around us, waiting for the referee to start the match.

I threw all of my energy into that one arm. So did Patti! Our forearms quivered, but there was no significant movement in one direction or the other. This went on for about a minute, and I started to feel really tired. I liked Patti. We shouldn't have been arm wrestling each other; we should have been off somewhere sharing a slice of cake. Someone captured a picture of my wrestling match with Patti about a minute into our match. The wide-eyed look on my face could have been translated, "I can't keep holding this; I sure hope it's over soon!"

Does my arm wrestling match remind you of any situation you're in right now? Are you trying to wrestle a situation at home, at work, or in a relationship that you can't seem to fix? When we face problems but we're unable to protect, fix, or get something back on track, it's easy for us to feel overwhelmed or discouraged.

Today we're going to go backward in the story of the Israelites and learn some insights from what happened when God first called Moses to lead them out of slavery into the wilderness. Moses didn't have the confidence that he could do what God called him to do, but God spoke assurances and promises that can uplift and encourage our hearts, as well. Whatever you're facing today isn't on your shoulders to solve. As Moses discovered, God's power is all you need!

Read Exodus 3:1-2. Where was Moses when he saw the blazing bush?

Before he led the Israelites, Moses spent forty years in the wilderness as a shepherd. It's interesting that God chose him to be their leader since Moses would have been familiar with the wilderness living conditions.

Moses sees the burning bush that does not burn up, and so he approaches it. Then he hears God speaking to him.

Read Exodus 1:7-8, and complete the following statements:

God tells Moses that He has heard the Israelites'

_____. (v. 7)

**God says that He will _____ the Israelites
from the Egyptians. (v. 8)**

**God plans to bring the people of Israel to a land flowing with
_____ and _____. (v. 9)**

As you read earlier this week, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites and treated them horribly. The Israelites were trapped in a situation in which they had no control, and God heard their cries for help. God not only laid out a plan to rescue the Israelites, but He promised to resettle the people in a place where the phrase “flowing with milk and honey” would be a symbol of God’s generosity.¹⁰

When God spoke to Moses, the people of Israel were still suffering and in slavery, yet God declared His promises over their lives. This is important to us because whenever we’re in a wilderness season marked by any one of the trials that we studied earlier this week, God promises to do what He says He will do, even though we have to trust His timing. We can trust God to keep His promises because He cannot lie (see Hebrews 10:23). However, it’s important to remember that not all of God’s promises will be fulfilled in our time here on earth.

Look up these promises from God and summarize each one:

Deuteronomy 31:8

Psalms 34:17

Isaiah 43:2

John 8:36

Revelation 21:4

Which one or more of these promises do you need today? Why?

There are thousands of promises made by God in the Bible. The reason I chose to highlight these promises is because wilderness seasons can make us forget God's faithfulness, and we need to remember that God has a future for us.

When the Israelites were in slavery and unable to change or control their circumstances, they cried out to God for help and held on to the hope that He would show up in their circumstances. Eventually, He did! God called Moses. However, Moses struggled with the role that God called him to play.

Read Exodus 1:11-15. What are Moses' objections to God's instructions?

What holy name does God tell Moses to give the people when they ask who sent him?

Moses protested because he didn't feel qualified to lead, represent God, or communicate well. Yet the success of God's plan didn't rely on Moses' capacity or capabilities. God didn't ask Moses to do anything other than show up in the places where God sent him and share the message that God gave him to share. God proclaimed that it would be His power that would do the work to free the Israelite people.

Read Exodus 1:19-21. God tells Moses that the king of Egypt won't let the Israelites go unless what happens?

As a bonus, what will God cause the Egyptians to give the Israelites as they leave? (v. 21)

In verse 19, God explains that nothing can free the Israelites from slavery unless a mighty hand forces the king of Egypt to let them go. It would not be Moses who would force the king to free God's people; it would be God doing the work. Even as Moses questioned his ability to show up and do a good job, God wasn't worried. As one writer describes it, "When we tell God our weaknesses, we aren't sharing anything He doesn't already know. The will of God will never lead you where the power of God can't enable you, so walk by faith in His promises."¹¹

**Is there a situation you've been trying to fix but nothing has worked?
If so, describe it briefly:**

How has the constant stress of the situation impacted your life?

During trials and wilderness seasons, we often spend a lot of mental energy trying to stay in whatever fight is most important to us—the fight for financial security, our marriage, our child's survival, our jobs, or our faith. However, fighting in a situation that you can't change, control, or conquer will wear you down and eventually wear you out. At a certain point, we'll choose one of three responses. Here are the first two:

1. Giving up is losing hope.
2. Giving in is caving in to another's agenda.

Are there any places in your heart or mind where you feel like giving up or giving in?

Perhaps you're at the point where you've given up or are considering it. You're exhausted from trying to push all of the buttons, pull all of the levers, and fix all of the problems. Maybe you've given in to the unhealthy requests and demands of others because you're afraid or you don't know what else to do. Like Moses, you've got lots of excuses even though you know what God is calling you to do.

But hold on. There's a third option that can lift the weight of problems from your heart and position you to experience God's power working in and through your life. That option is not giving up or giving in but, rather, letting go.

3. Letting go is not trying to fix or force a solution but living in faith that God will do what is best.

Another word for letting go is *surrender*. Letting go, or surrendering, is a prayer, a plan, and a process. There are some situations where we'll be able to

let go more easily than others. There also are times when we realize that we can let go in the moment, but then we move back into trying to control when we don't feel that God is moving fast enough. Over time, as we practice letting go and living like Jesus, we discover what it looks and feels like to completely surrender others and outcomes to God, leaving them totally in His hands.

Here's a visual of what I think the letting go process looks like. Again, it's not a step-by-step process but rather an ongoing process of asking questions that can help us move away from being a remote control for others or outcomes and move toward learning how to open our hands to invite God into whatever we're facing.

Here are the questions that you can ask in the Letting Go Loop:

Awareness—Am I trying to control others or outcomes right now?

Arrest—What do I need to stop trying to protect, fix, or force to make happen?

Acceptance—Where do I need to acknowledge the reality that I do not have control but God can and will handle it?

FaithFULL Action—How can I show faith, unconditional love, and wisdom without control-loving behaviors?



You might not feel like you can let go yet, and that's okay. We're going to spend the coming weeks together learning how to let go and live like Jesus. But I want to share two important verses that encourage me when my control-loving whispers seem too loud to ignore and I get so discouraged or frustrated that I want to give up.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:4 in the margin. According to this verse, what weapons do you have available to you to help you fight back against control-loving mindsets and behaviors?

⁴We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.

(2 Corinthians 10:4 NLT)

Now read Galatians 6:9 in the margin. Why does Paul encourage us to keep going and not give up trusting God?

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.

(Galatians 6:9 NLT)

The word *good* in Galatians 6:9 is the Greek word *kalos*, meaning “an outward sign of the inward good, noble, honorable character.”¹² This means that while we may face circumstances and outcomes beyond our control, we don't have to give up on making the daily decisions that reflect our trust in God.

Moses gives God a lot of excuses as to why he isn't the right person for the job. He wants to give up before he ever gets started. However, he *does* follow God's call in obedience, and he has faith that God will fulfill His promises—even though he protests a lot and doesn't feel very confident.

On the first day of this week's study, I shared a story about being facedown on my kitchen floor. On that day, I felt like giving up on my faith because that season of testing had pushed me to the limits. Even though I'd grown up in the church and, at the time, worked part-time for my church, I was ready to throw in the towel. I never thought there would be a day when I'd be tempted to walk away from my faith, but I was so disappointed with God and disgusted with myself that I'd lost hope life could be better.

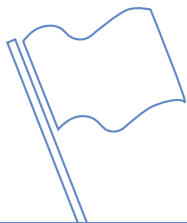
As I sat up and leaned my back against the lower cupboards, I thought about what my life would be like if God was no longer a part of it. It didn't take long for me to realize that I would be on my own. As I considered that I needed God because I couldn't handle my unmanageable life on my own, I was challenged in that moment to stop trying to manage my life and allow God to do His job.

At that point, nothing had changed but God used that desperate difficult moment to begin transforming my beliefs. It was at that point when I decided that I would stop trying to do God's job for him. From my kitchen floor I declared the following: *God, if it's gonna get done, you're going to have to do it!*

Now, it's your turn. Are you ready to make a declaration in your life? Here are a few questions for you:

- Are you tired of trying to fix problems that aren't in your control?
- Are you tired of trying to help people who don't want to do what's healthy or helpful for themselves?
- Are you tired of playing God?

Each week I will be introducing a Surrender Principle, which is a short saying that you can repeat to yourself in moments when you're tempted to pull out one of those SHINE control-loving behaviors in order to get what you want. Here's our first one:



SURRENDER PRINCIPLE #1:

I am not in control of others or outcomes.

You know that this is true, but sometimes, it's helpful to have a short sentence to repeat as a reminder. Now, I'm going to invite you to take a tangible first step toward letting go and making a declaration of surrender to God. You can do this by filling in the blanks below:

My Declaration of Surrender

Dear God, I am tired of trying to fix/solve

_____.

In the past I have tried to _____

_____.

and I have felt discouraged and defeated because this situation is out of my control.

But God, You can handle this situation. So today I surrender myself and my situation to You. Over the next few weeks of this study, I commit to learning what it means to walk in surrender. But for today, I declare that I am willing to let go of this situation and give it to You.

I surrender.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Prayer

Thank You, God, for being God. There are situations in my life that I cannot handle, and I am grateful that You can. So, as I've written in my declaration, I'm giving those situations over to You. Thank You for taking care of me and what I cannot control. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Week 1 Video Viewer Guide

S _____

H _____

I _____

N _____

E _____ or Overstocking

A: (You are) _____ loved.

B: _____ that God is for you.

Exodus 3:7-8

Exodus 16:1-4

God takes care of His children at _____ times,
especially _____ times.

Matthew 6:11

Matthew 6:34

Joshua 1:9

C: _____ yourself to trust God and let go.

Surrender Principle #1

I am not in control of _____ or _____.